Interview with Theodore L. Eliot Jr.

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR THEODORE L. ELIOT, JR.

Interviewed by: Robert Martens

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This is an oral history interview with Ambassador Theodore Eliot conducted by Robert Martens. Among his various assignments Ted Eliot served in the American embassy in Moscow in the mid-"50s, the height of the Cold War and, in 1959-62, as special assistant to Douglas Dillon, when the latter was Under Secretary of State and later Secretary of the Treasury. During the mid-1960s he served in the American embassy in Tehran, and later as Country Director for Iran. With the advent of the Nixon administration, Ted became Executive Secretary of the State Department, and Special Assistant to Secretary William Rogers. He served for four and one half years in 1973-78 as Ambassador to Afghanistan, and then became Inspector General of the State Department. He retired in 1978, and was named Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. After seven years in that position Ambassador Eliot moved to the San Francisco area and a period of service there with the Asia Foundation from which he subsequently retired. He has been the recipient of a number of the Department of State's highest awards including the Replogle Management Award in 1973, and the Director General's Cup around 1984 or 1985. He is married with four children.

Q: Let us begin by reviewing very briefly your early life; education; and early Foreign Service career.

ELIOT: Well, I grew up in the Boston area in a family that was very much interested in politics, including international affairs, and a father who was in the transportation business. So I always had an urge to travel. I did my bachelor's degree at Harvard in what most universities call political science, but Harvard calls government, with a strong dose of history; moved out after college to San Francisco, where my parents were then living and worked for a year with the Standard Oil Company of California. When they would not assign me to ARAMCO, which I very much wanted to do, I was lured by a Foreign Service recruiter into applying for the Foreign Service. They didn't have space for me as a diplomatic courier, so I joined the Service in the spring of '49 as a clerk. I got to Washington and a personnel officer interviewed me for my first assignment, and said, “With your background, why don't you take the Foreign Service officer exam?” And I said, “What's that?” I was pretty naive, I guess, but at any rate I took the exam in the fall of 1949, and was sent off to my first post, Colombo, in 1951, still an FSS, but got my FSO commission while at Colombo.

Q: We will devote most of the time to your later career, but with the collapse of the Soviet Union there may be interest in your observations, as well as those of others, in your Soviet period. That was in the mid-'50. After Russian training at FSI, and Harvard's Russian Institute, you served in Moscow from 1956 to '58, first as the administrative officer, and later as a political officer. What were your major impressions, particularly in light of the subsequent collapse of communism?

ELIOT: Well, of course, those were drab years for an American in the Soviet Union. It's a drab country to begin with, but these were particularly drab years with the KGB listening in on you and watching you all the time. My wife and I were fortunate. We were among the first people, I think, in the embassy—maybe the first couple—to get our driver's licenses, and we imported a Volkswagen Bug from Germany, and we had quite a lot of fun with the KGB in that car actually. And we were able to travel a little bit, including with our

interviewer to what was then called Stalingrad on one occasion. I think we may have been the first Americans to travel around Stalingrad in a car...

Q: ...on down to the Kalmuk...

ELIOT: ...and on down to the Kalmuk territory, and we saw why the German tanks had bogged down in the mud because that's what happened to us. Then in the fall of '57 we were among the first Americans to visit Riga since World War II, at the time Sputnik went up. And what was interesting in Riga in the fall of '57 was the Latvians would take you aside and say, “Gee, will you help us get rid of these Russians?”, which they finally achieved.

Two vignettes I might add, I think some of us coming out of the academic world in those days, who were steeped in Brzezinski's and Carl Friedrich's studies of totalitarianism, were beginning to raise the question as to whether a totalitarian regime could survive if it did not continue to impose terror. Of course, Khrushchev in that period seemed to be easing up a little bit, and that I think raised a question in some of our minds—this may be hindsight, but I'm quite certain I remember some of us raising the question as to whether this regime could survive without terror.

Then there was the question as to whether one could do business with Khrushchev, and my memory also is that most of us, reasonably fresh out of Russian studies at Columbia, Harvard, and elsewhere, really were so down on that regime that we didn't see the possibilities for detente the way our Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson saw them. And he was right, and we were wrong. One of the things I will always remember is my admiration for his skill as a diplomat, which, of course later in his career became evident at the time of the Cuban missile crisis where he played an absolutely key role.

Q: Yes, that's certainly true. Of course he had also been very prominent in the settlement of the Trieste crisis and working out the Austrian State Treaty in May of 1955, which were the first breakthroughs in the Cold War.

ELIOT: Travel was certainly tough in those days, but it was really the only opportunity one had to have talks with Soviet citizens. In Moscow you were constantly shielded from them, and the KGB was inserting itself. But on these trips one had a chance to talk with Soviet citizens and certainly got the impression that their low standard of living bothered them a great deal, and they would ask lots of questions about, for example, how much did our shoes cost? how many days work to buy a pair of shoes? and that sort of thing indicating a craving for consumer goods which was not being satisfied by the regime. I don't remember, in that period—there may have been some but I don't remember in that period—the depth of cynicism about the regime that became evident 15-20 years later.

Q: I felt at the time, I might say, and I wrote a 25 page final report on that which never got out of the embassy.

ELIOT: Well you were more prescient than I.

Q: After you came back from Moscow, you worked briefly, as I recall, on the Soviet desk, but then soon thereafter you began working for Douglas Dillon—this was in the late Eisenhower administration—when Dillon was, I believe, Under Secretary of the Department.

ELIOT: At first he was Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, and then moved up to the number two position.

Q: ...what would now be Deputy Secretary, and then when the Kennedy administration came in, Dillon moved over to be Secretary of the Treasury, and you moved over with him. And among other things I recall that you set up some kind of an operations center there for the first time modeled on the State operations center, which is one thing you may wish to

comment on—how it worked, etc., but then also maybe get into some questions of what State- Treasury relations were, not only at that time, but any perceptions you might have on any continuing observations over the years on that problem?

ELIOT: I think I'd like to start with what Douglas Dillon was doing, and what he brought to the State Department. He was a very exciting man to work for. Not so much in terms of his personality, which was not all that exciting, but in terms of his brilliance, and his energy, and his drive. He was aided and assisted by some pretty remarkable people. One was Graham Martin, who was probably best known as our last ambassador to Vietnam. Graham had worked for him when Dillon had been ambassador in Paris, and at that time there were several American ambassadors in Paris assigned to various different organizations there, and Graham worked things out so that clearly the ambassador to France, namely Douglas Dillon, was premier inter pares. When Dillon came back to Washington, first as Under Secretary of Economic Affairs, and then as number two, Graham obviously under Dillon's directions stitched together a bunch of executive orders which Dulles, the Secretary of State, approved and Eisenhower signed, which in effect made Dillon the czar of America's foreign economic policy, reporting directly to the President on such issues, obviously keeping the Secretary of State informed. Dillon ran foreign aid in all its aspects. The director of what is now A.I.D., then ICA, the head of the Development Bank—the Development Loan Funds as it was called in those days —was appointed by Dillon, and reported to him. Military assistance, which was run by International Security Affairs in the Pentagon, reported to Dillon. This was a period where the Department of State ran, under Douglas Dillon, this very important aspect of American foreign policy. That organization was destroyed when the Kennedy administration came in, but that's another story.

The other remarkable people who worked for Dillon in those days were Dixon Donnelley, who was his public affairs assistant, and later moved with him to the Treasury, and later was Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs. And Dixon was the word merchant, but he had also worked for Senator Estes Kefauver, and he knew the Hill very well, and

helped Dillon who was a lousy public speaker when he started out. He helped make him a pretty darn good public speaker, helped him on his Congressional testimony, knew how to get, as Dixon used to say, “the story above the fold on the front page.” And one of the people Douglas Dillon encountered, because he was very influential on foreign aid matters, including especially with regard to India, was a young Massachusetts Senator named Jack Kennedy, and that became a very close friendship. And, of course, it was a surprise to many Republicans when Dillon accepted the job of Secretary of the Treasury under Kennedy. Most of the people who wondered about that didn't realize what a close personal friendship had grown up between these two men. And I might add, between their two wives.

The third key player on Dillon's staff was a man named John Leddy, who later became Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for international matters under Dillon, and then moved back to the State Department as Assistant Secretary for Europe. John was a tireless worker, and a brilliant man who helped stitch together much of what Dillon did in the foreign economic policy field. One of the key trade negotiations in that period under GATT, was called the Dillon Round. It was also the period when the beginnings of the European Community were being sketched out by Jean Monnet who was a close friend of Dillon's. So these were enormously exciting times.

He also had a staff helping him run the foreign aid picture, headed by a man named John O. Bell—Jack Bell—who had an ambassadorship later in his career. But Jack and his staff were enormously effective.

I can assure you that everybody who worked for him worked round the clock seven days a week. He was the kind of a guy who would be given a paper on some issue, and he'd call in the Assistant Secretary who had prepared it, and say, “It looks pretty good to me, except you've made an arithmetical mistake on page 43 of annex B, and I think that may change some of your conclusions.” And a few instances of that kind kept everybody on their toes. He was a remarkable man to work for. I know in his view, and also in mine, it was a

tragedy for the State Department when his successor in State, George Ball, decided he wasn't interested in having that kind of power over the foreign economic scene, and it got split up among various agencies around the government, and eventually, of course, had to be funneled in and coordinated in the White House, and State lost tremendous authority over basic parts of foreign economic policy: trade, now with a special trade representative; foreign aid— lord knows where that is now. Since Dillon I don't think anybody at the really senior level in the State Department has had authority over foreign aid. And this, for better or worse- -I think for the worse—because I think the Secretary of State and the President need a strong State Department to run these important aspects of the foreign policy. But that ended with Dillon's departure to the Treasury in 1961.

We moved over there between the election and the inauguration, and he brought Dixon Donnelley and John Leddy, as well as myself, and his wonderful secretary Dorothy de Borchgrave with him. And we formed in due course the same kind of close knit-team in Treasury that we had had in State, including in both instances, career people in both State and Treasury. He had a wonderful Under Secretary for Monetary Affairs, named Bob Roosa, who had been very experienced in the Federal Reserve, who brought in as his deputy a very tall, but quite young man, named Paul Volcker. We had some pretty outstanding people around Dillon in the Treasury. And one of the things that Dillon worked out immediately with Kennedy was that he would be responsible for all policy issues having to do with our balance of payments. Now a lot of that got grabbed away, of course, from the State Department. But the State Department didn't fight to keep it. It fell to Dillon for the asking, and that, of course, made my job as his special assistant in the Treasury a lot more interesting than it otherwise would have been.

The Treasury is a fascinating place for a Foreign Service Officer to work because it is so deeply involved with domestic affairs, especially tax policy. And those were years in which the Kennedy administration worked very hard on tax policy. It was when the investment tax credit, for example, first came into our tax code. And Dillon had to get that through a Hill which in those matters was dominated by Wilbur Mills and Harry Byrd, no slouches in their

areas. I remember Dillon going up on the Hill testifying on some of these very complicated tax matters, all alone at the table, never turning to staff for advice, for as long as three days' stretch. This was an extraordinary man. And the fact that he was extraordinary, of course, led all of us to work that much harder to make him as successful as we possibly could.

I left Dillon in the summer of '62, and hence had gone when Kennedy died, and was not around when he stayed on under LBJ which was not as happy a relationship for him as it had been with Kennedy. And, if I remember correctly, he finally left before the '64 election. But he was extraordinary.

Yes, I did set up a small secretariat in the Treasury in an effort to give him a little more control over the paper flow, and to give me a little more control over the paper flow to him, and to the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury. But compared to State, it was a much, much smaller operation. In fact, it was a two or three-person operation.

State-Treasury relations. He and Dean Rusk had a good relationship, and I think down the line in the Treasury it was a much better relationship than had existed when his predecessor, Robert Anderson, was Secretary of the Treasury, and Dulles, Herter, and Dillon were over in State. Anderson was a very difficult man to deal with. Dillon had some problems with the White House staff, but his direct line to Kennedy was such that those got overridden without too much difficulty—much, of course, to the glee of some of us working with Dillon. So those external relationships were really not major factors.

I should tell one other anecdote, I think. In December 1960 when I had moved over and he had an office down the hall from the outgoing Secretary, Bob Anderson. For the first and only time, even though I had worked for him for a year and a half already, he called me into his office to try to explain to me what he expected me to do for him. I don't remember all the details of this story, which was a relatively short one, but he had worked for an admiral, whose name I won't recall, in the Pacific theater as a naval officer during the

war. He said, “Ted, when we started out this admiral didn't have very much influence, but by the end of the war he controlled an awful lot of things in the Pacific theater, and I helped him achieve that control. Well, that's sort of what I'd like you to do for me here in the Treasury. Do you understand?” That was my job description, the only one I ever got from him. So, those were highly challenging—I was Daddy Who at home—but those were highly instructive years.

It got to be in the summer of '62, after three years at this pace, I was kind of tired, and I got his permission to go to the personnel people in the State Department to see if they wanted me back. I might also say that I never got a promotion in the Foreign Service in this period. I think they heavily discounted efficiency reports—performance reports—from somebody like Dillon. That pained him a little bit; he thought I deserved promotion. At any rate, I was still an FSO-4 after three years working for him. I went over to State and asked them what would they give me if I were to come back? And they offered me the job as financial officer in the economic section in Tehran. And that sounded interesting to me, but I thought I'd better check it out with Dillon. And I went to him, and I said, “You know all I know about finance is what I've learned sitting at your feet for the last three years.” He said, “Don't worry about that, Ted, it's all politics anyway.” So that's the job I accepted, and went off to Tehran.

Q: So you went off to Tehran, and were there for several years, and, as I recall, you came back to be Country Director for Iran. I remember seeing you in that period. That was in the latter part of the LBJ presidency. You stayed in that until the Nixon administration came in, which we'll get into later. I think at this point we might ask what conclusions you might have—not only on your period in Iran—but your period after that as Country Director, and even to some extent the observations you have in a more general sense over the years since. I know you were, in fact, brought into play at one point many years later as the Shah regime was collapsing, on a possible role.

ELIOT: One of the things I have learned by this time, is that luck plays quite a role in a Foreign Service career, and it just so happened that while I was in this job as financial officer, our relations with Iran changed, as indeed they should have changed from a primarily grant aid program to a loan program. And loans, of course, were the job of the financial officer in the Embassy. And questions of Iran's balance of payments, and ability to repay, etc. all stopped at my desk and they were in many ways—both in military assistance and in economic assistance—the key questions that had to be answered. So, willy-nilly, I became a key person on the Embassy staff working directly often with the Ambassador on these questions. So it was not illogical when the time came when the Department set up the Country Director system, that I became the first Country Director for Iran, working with the same Ambassador, Armin Meyer, that I had been working with the last year or so in Tehran.

These were happy years in Iran. The Shah was doing extremely well; he was listening to the advice of many western, including many American-trained economists. He was accreting more power to himself, but he seemed to be acting with considerable wisdom. His resources were not so great that he was beginning to feel himself—as he did later — omnipotent. We had some control over our funds and his ability to purchase military equipment by linking such purchases to his economic and balance-of-payments situation. And the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were very insistent that we maintain that kind of control. And I must say this continued through my three years as Country Director. There were constant missions from Washington, constant questions to the embassy about the Shah's financial resources aimed at trying to insist to him that his economic development program not be prejudiced by his military expenditures. And I'm not saying that we handled this situation perfectly, or that his military appetite was always restrained, but it certainly was in comparison with the later period in the Nixon administration, I think we were reasonably successful in keeping a balance within Iran.

I was involved, as Country Director, in selling him his first Phantom F-4s, which was done on a credit basis through the military sales credit program. Of course, he knew how to play the Soviet card. He said, “If we don't buy it from you, we'll have to buy it from other people, maybe including the Soviet Union.” And he did buy a few things from the Soviets like trucks, maybe some artillery pieces, just to prove his point. But it was also equally clear to us that he wasn't going to go to them for anything very sophisticated because his American connection was too important to him.

He and LBJ had a fine relationship. LBJ used to walk him around the White House grounds arm-in-arm. I had no problems getting recommendations through all the way to the President with his signature for our major initiatives aimed at supporting the Shah. It was hard work in those days because Iran was on the front burner a lot of the time, and both on the seventh floor of the State Department, and at the White House, but it was happy work in the sense that we didn't run into too many bureaucratic obstacles, and when we did they were very easy to override because we knew we had the support of the President.

Now, in the light of subsequent history, did we overdo it with the Shah in those days? Should we have been a little tougher on him and tried to force the pace of democratization? I don't think so. I think we struck a pretty good balance, and one thing that has to be remembered is that our influence was limited. He did have other resources. He didn't get all his resources from us. And I became convinced then, if I hadn't been already, and I've certainly been subsequently even more convinced, that by and large Americans don't know enough about how these other countries work to be able to play god with their internal political systems.

I have no regrets, and no feelings that we should have played our Iranian policy much differently than what we did in the 1960s when I was so intimately involved with it. There are certainly many critics who have written about that period. In fact, when I went to Iran there were a lot of people who thought the Shah would soon fall, and soon collapse. He

didn't. The basic decision was made long before I was involved, back in 1953, when we conspired to overthrow Mossadegh and keep the Shah on the throne. The reason for doing that was that we were afraid Mossadegh was a wedge for the Soviet Union inside Iran. That decision can be criticized in hindsight, but at the time Eisenhower, Dulles, and everybody else involved thought that's the way it was going to be.

Although when I was Executive Secretary, '69 to '73, obviously I continued to be knowledgeable about Iranian policy, but I was not directly involved until just after I retired in the fall of '78—actually, I guess, early January '79—my wife and I were packing our house up in Washington preparing to move to Boston to the Fletcher School, when I got a call from the then Under Secretary for Political Affairs, David Newsom, to come into the Department. And what was going on was that Khomeini, in Paris, was on the verge, it appeared, of returning to Tehran for the first time since he had been exiled by the Shah in 1963, and no senior American official had yet had contact with Khomeini, and the thought was that I should go over there and have a chat with him. We had some rather specific things we hoped Khomeini would agree to that would preserve and protect some of those people in Iran who had been important for us. This mission was set up by Warren Zimmermann, now our Ambassador in what was Yugoslavia who was in the Paris Embassy and had contact, if I remember correctly, with Khomeini's foreign policy guy.

I was led to understand—and this is a little footnote to the story—that Khomeini had agreed to receive me. Later I mentioned this to Brzezinski, who fervently denied that that was the case. And after hearing that from Brzezinski, I had a further conversation with David Newsom who said, “No, indeed. Not only was that the case, but Brzezinski didn't necessarily know everything that was happening in those days.” Sometimes Vance talked directly to the President, which indicated the degree of problems in the Carter administration, which I guess the world subsequently knew about. At any rate, it was my impression, and Newsom confirmed this, that Khomeini had agreed to receive me.

The other aspect was whether the Shah, who was still in power in Tehran, would object to this visit. Bill Sullivan, our then Ambassador, went to the Shah and cleared it with him. The Shah hemmed and hawed; obviously it was a painful thing for him—very painful—but he hemmed and hawed, and said, “Well, of course. I don't blame you. That would be a normal and natural thing for you to do.” The Secretary of State, Vance, had approved it, and I was all set to go one day—I was leaving one evening for Tehran. I called the President of Tufts University, in which Fletcher resides, and told him something had come up and was it all right if I postponed my coming to Fletcher by a few days? And he said, that was fine with him. So I had my ticket, I was ready to leave that evening, when Newsom called me—I guess early afternoon—and said, “Ted, its been scrubbed, and the Secretary would like to talk to you about this in the morning.”

So the next morning I went over and saw Vance. Hal Saunders, Assistant Secretary for NEA, was present at that conversation, as well as the Country Director for Iran, Henry Precht. I learned that Carter and Brzezinski, who were then down at Martinique—I can't recall what the meeting was, except that the then French President, probably Giscard, was there, but I wasn't involved in that so I don't remember why he was on Martinique, but it was some kind of a western power summit meeting. And Brzezinski and Carter had canceled the mission. And Vance tried to describe to me why they had done so, and Henry Precht and I, and Hal Saunders, walked out together and none of us could really understand the reason we had heard. It didn't track. Perhaps it was that Vance, himself, didn't understand it because he favored the mission. The only thing that Henry Precht and I seemed to be able to agree on was that it was very hard for one chief of state, Jimmy Carter, to conspire at ousting another chief of state, the Shah of Iran; that there was this feeling about one chief of state for a fellow chief of state. Because the cancellation of the mission didn't seem to make any substantive sense with the Shah and Khomeini having both approved it.

At any rate, as a result of its cancellation, as far as I know no senior American official ever met with Khomeini. Would it have made a difference? Would my mission have made a difference? Gary Sick in his book, and I'm not going to remember right away who wrote the book about Ross Perot's Iranian rescue mission, but this appears in both those books, as well as in Bill Sullivan's memoirs. And Gary Sick in particular thought it was rather incongruous seeing Ted Eliot sitting cross-legged at the feet of Khomeini and having a conversation with him. That occurred to me too at the time; among other things my tendons don't permit me to sit cross-legged very well.

Would it have had any substantive effect on Khomeini's policies? I think not. Khomeini was determined to do what he eventually did, and he needed the foreign scapegoat, and the United States having been the great supporter of the Shah, was the obvious scapegoat. So I don't think it would have made any difference in softening his policies regarding what he did to our friends in Iran, including the military. It might have given us some other access at some point in the future, but you'll recall that various Iranian officials did meet with Americans in the future and immediately lost their jobs, if not their heads. So my guess is that it wouldn't have made a difference. It's an interesting historical vignette. It was a little frustrating to be part of it in the way I was. That ended my close connections with Iranian policy.

Oh, except for one other thing I should mention. Many years later when I was by now at the Asia Foundation, so this must have been probably in '86, Secretary Shultz used to have Saturday seminars up on the eighth floor where he would invite experts on a subject that interested him, and the senior people in Washington, to come in and he'd sit away from the table in an armchair, and listen to all of us around the table discussing. And the subject this Saturday, which I was invited to participate in, was Afghanistan, which by then, of course, was in the middle of the Mujahideen war against the Russians. The Secretary of Defense was there, and I think Casey was there, and Gates was also there from CIA, and then a few of us from the outside world who knew something about Afghanistan.

I remember about the only substantive contribution I made was that I thought it was very important for the United States to reestablish communication with Iran because the Iranians could play a helpful role in helping to get the Soviets out of Afghanistan, which the Iranians even under Khomeini very much wanted to do. I pushed quite hard at a number of points in the conversation for our trying to establish some mode of communication with Iran. I didn't get any reaction from Shultz, or any of the government officials there. Little did I know what was going on. (Laughter) The idea of carrying bibles and chocolate cakes to Khomeini was about the most absurd thing I ever heard in my life.

Q: Isn't that the truth.

You were appointed Executive Secretary of the Department when the Nixon administration came in, and held that position I think around four years. You obviously had a unique vantage point in observing both the unique period of American foreign policy, that is the first Nixon administration, but also the frustrating interplay between Secretary Rogers and Henry Kissinger in the period when Kissinger was the National Security adviser. And also to some extent, I suppose, between the institutions themselves, that is the State Department and the White House staff. I'll leave it to you how you want to proceed on these matters.

ELIOT: Well, I became Executive Secretary. I was appointed fairly early in '69, but for various reasons didn't actually take over until the summer—I think it was July, if I remember correctly. By this time Kissinger had set up the organization of the NSC machinery in such a way that he clearly ran things directly for the President, and the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Defense, for that matter, were really in subordinate positions. Having had those spectacular years with Douglas Dillon who liked to run everything, and was good at running everything, it was, of course, frustrating to me that Secretary Rogers didn't have a similar point of view and battle harder for the position of the State Department in the formulation and execution of foreign policy.

Rogers had, of course, been a friend of Nixon for many years. In fact, two of the incidents in Nixon's book, Six Crises, involved Nixon going to Rogers for help. In one case he actually moved in with the Rogers in Bethesda. This was when Ike had his heart attack. The other incident was the Checkers incident when he went to Rogers, who had been Attorney General under Eisenhower—a very fine Attorney General—to get advice on how to handle it. Rogers, I think, probably—I'm just guessing here—felt that his long friendship with Nixon would mean that he would retain a considerable degree of influence. Nixon, on the other hand, clearly had not much interest in having Rogers play a major role. Many years later when he came to visit Afghanistan when I was Ambassador, Henry Kissinger told me his version of this story namely that Nixon had to prove to the world that he didn't need Rogers anymore, and that's why he behaved towards Rogers the way he did. And Kissinger went on at some length to explain this was all Nixon's doing, and none of his, Henry Kissinger's, doing. Fortunately when he was telling me this the car pulled up at our next stop and I didn't have to respond because I'm not sure what I would have said, but of course I found this totally unbelievable. Henry obviously thoroughly enjoyed the power that was bestowed on him by Nixon. And as far as I know never did anything to help Rogers out in any of the problems Rogers got into in terms of these bureaucratic battles.

I think it's fair to say that the situation between the White House, the NSC staff, and the State Department, would have been a lot worse had it not been for pretty good relationships at lower levels, at the Assistant Secretary level, for example, with their counterparts in the NSC staff, many of whom were Foreign Service Officers.

Q: Very able ones, and many who came back and stayed later.

ELIOT: That's right, and many of whom themselves became Assistant Secretaries for the regions like John Holdridge for example, who was under Kissinger in the NSC staff and later was Assistant Secretary for East Asia. The State Department, and NSC people who engaged in this relationship, of course, had to be very careful because Rogers highly resented some of this activity. And the Assistant Secretaries could never be sure when

Rogers might want to lower the boom on them for this kind of activity. So this was difficult, but it was very important.

And secondly, Henry was constantly on guard to make sure that his people didn't tell the State Department things he didn't want them to tell the State Department. Henry realized that the control of information and communications was the route to power, and many of his communications did not go through the State Department's communication system. He used the CIA, or the military communication system to by- pass Rogers and the State Department.

Another channel which I think was very useful, and I certainly appreciated it, was the channel between me and Henry's assistant. When I first knew him, he was Colonel Alexander Haig, and gradually then, of course, became General and went on to more famous jobs. But Al Haig and I had a very close working relationship, and Al would call me up occasionally, and say, “Ted, I think there's something the Secretary of State really should know,” and sometimes those communications were interrupted by a guttural voice in the background behind Haig saying, “Vat are you telling him, and vy are you telling him?” So Haig was taking a certain risk in doing this, but Haig, being a career military officer, and knowing how things should be run at the staff level, occasionally at least, tried to keep Rogers informed in a way that Henry directly wasn't doing.

Another key player here was Ural Alexis Johnson, who played a very important role. Alex's view of the situation was: the President sets up the machinery, and it's our job to make it work. And Alex was a superb operations officer on many critical issues, including Vietnam.

Q: He was Under Secretary for Political Affairs.

ELIOT: That's correct, so he was really the top career man, and all of us went to cry on Alex's shoulders about the problems that this relationship with the Kissinger staff posed for us when we were trying to get our jobs done. And, as I say, his answer was, that's the machinery the President wants, let us try and make it work. And he did a superb job under

very difficult circumstances inside the State Department, and on the operational side on tough issues, including many Vietnamese issues. So those were tough days.

The Executive Secretary's job, then as now, was a seven- day-a-week job. I had some wonderful deputies: Bob Brown, Bob Miller, Bob Brewster, Ted Curran, Harry Barnes, and it was a wonderful staff. We really could get anybody we wanted from the Foreign Service to work in the Secretariat. And we had at any one time probably 35 Foreign Service officers there, and they were all learning how the system really worked at the higher levels because they were working for the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary, and the Under Secretary, staffing their papers, and getting the communications into the right hands. And many of them have gone on to become Ambassadors, some still today. I have many friends at Ambassadorial posts in various places in the world because they worked for me in those days. Particularly, I think, I give credit to Bob Brewster for getting the right people to work for us, and having had senior jobs in the administrative and personnel side of the Department, he was very expert at that.

We also did something else that I think has stood the Department in good stead, and I guess it's why I got that Replogle Award that you mentioned earlier. We modernized the communications on the seventh floor of the State Department. It's hard to believe that in 1969 our secretaries, including my secretary, had to type out an evening final report for the day—it was called the President's Evening Reading. And I gather he actually read it. It had to be sent over letter perfect, and she did it on an old IBM typewriter, and I learned that she knew some four-letter words because with one typo she had to rip the damn thing out of the typewriter and start all over again to get it letter perfect. We didn't have even a magnetic tape, or card typewriter in the office of the Secretary of State in '69 and '70. And the Operations Center filing system was, you put a rubber thimble on your finger and went through paper files. We worked very hard on this, both with respect to the filing system, and with respect to the communications system. We automated the filing system working with John Thomas, the Assistant Secretary for Administration. We got the optical character reader system in the telegraphic side of the State Department, and gradually

we were putting cathode ray tubes in every Assistant Secretary's office, as well as in our own. We made major steps forward in the communications side. I'm very proud of that accomplishment, as I am proud of how we trained so many of these junior officers.

But the substantive side of the work was often extremely painful, and extremely difficult. I had great sympathy for Rogers, and there's absolutely no question in my mind that had Nixon used him, and gotten his advice on such issues as Watergate, Nixon would never have had to resign. But he didn't. I mean, here's the former Attorney General, a leader in the civil rights movement in America, a man of total integrity and wisdom, humor—Rogers was a great person to work with—left out in the cold. And Nixon's inability to use a man of that quality, and to go to him for advice as he did earlier in his career, was one of the reasons that he was toppled. And it was sad to be there, and sad to see this kind of erosion of morality at the highest levels in the country.

I was very lucky that when Rogers finally decided to resign in the summer of '73, that he made arrangements, not only for me, but for such other people that worked closely with him, as Dick Pedersen and Bob McCloskey, to go out with some honor into interesting Ambassadorships. But that was a close shave too because I was told that Henry wanted to keep me in Washington, and I had to rely on such old friends as Larry Eagleburger to keep that from happening. I had had eight straight tough years in Washington, and I really wanted to go to Afghanistan, and it happened, and I'm grateful to Larry, and Rogers, and others who helped in that process.

But on a broader scale, of course, I'm not sure one can really believe him when he says this, but in his memoirs Henry has come around to the point of view, supposedly, that this was not the right way to run the railroad.

Q: I've seen that too, yes.

ELIOT: And when he became Secretary of State it was a different ball game. He wanted to run the world (laughter) from that position. So things changed around. But then you had

similar problems in the Vance-Brzezinski period. It probably will come up again. It really depends in the final analysis on how the President wants to structure relationships. When you've got a man like Brent Scowcroft in the NSC position, you're going to have harmony because Brent is that kind of a guy. I worked closely with him too after Haig left the NSC staff, and Brent succeeded him. Brent is a very fine team player, and there have been no problems of that kind as far as I know in the Bush administration. There's a built-in rivalry there, but it reached its acme in the Kissinger-Rogers period and it was not good for the foreign policy of the United States.

Q: Certainly not for the institution of the State Department either.

ELIOT: And bad for the State Department as an institution. And that too, I think, is unfortunate because when you look at younger people who are interested in foreign policy careers, most of them these days are smart enough to see where the action is, and maybe the action isn't in the State Department or in the Foreign Service. Maybe it's in some of these other places. You can't blame them for thinking that there's a danger that the Foreign Service will not be as good a Service as it was in the past, if that becomes common belief reinforced by reality.

Q: So then, as the second Nixon administration began, or into it a little ways, you went off to become ambassador to Afghanistan, and remained there for quite a while I think.

ELIOT: Four and a half years.

Q: Four and a half years?

ELIOT: Yes.

Q: And left, of course, before the communist coup.

ELIOT: No, I left just after it, six weeks after it.

Q: I remember that Spike Dubs went in after you.

ELIOT: That's right. The coup was late April of '78. I left in mid-June, and Spike got there in mid-July and was assassinated the following February.

Q: Why don't you discuss this, both from the standpoint of what it was like during that four and a half period, and then probably with some insight into the subsequent period— sort of retrospective, if you will?

ELIOT: Just before I went there—as a matter of fact it's kind of an interesting little anecdote—I think the last time I was woken up in the middle of the night as Executive Secretary, was the Operations Center calling me to say there had been a coup—this was in July of '73—in Afghanistan, and I asked the usual questions: has the White House been informed? has Assistant Secretary of State—then Joe Sisco—been informed? are Americans safe? All the usual questions. And I made the decision that the rest of the apparatus could learn about it in the morning, that there would be no great disaster if we went to sleep. I put the phone down and then I suddenly realized, “My god, there's been a coup in the country that I'm about to go to. Am I still going?” Of course, my predecessor had to go into the new government to get a new agr#ment.

Q: Who was that?

ELIOT: That was Bob Neumann, who later was Ambassador in Morocco, and briefly in Saudi Arabia. And then I've already referred to Henry's desire to keep me in Washington. And then my confirmation hearings were held up because Henry's were held up because of the bugging of his subordinates issue which I won't go into at any great detail. And finally the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was ready to take me up, and they agreed to do so without a hearing. I don't know how many of our Ambassadors have been confirmed without a hearing. I may not be the only one, but I'm kind of proud of the fact they didn't have to see me to approve me. And off I went in the fall of '73.

The new government in Afghanistan was headed by the first cousin, and brother-in-law, of the King whom he had ousted, and in fact, the new President, Mohammed Daud, had been the Prime Minister during most of the 1950s into the early "60s, and the King had removed him primarily because he disagreed with Daud's policy vis-a-vis Pakistan. I don't know how much of this history you want me to go into, but when India was divided into Pakistan and India by the British, the Pakistanis ended up with the Pushtun tribal areas along the eastern borders of Afghanistan. And the Afghans said at that time that those people should have been given an option for independence, or even for joining Afghanistan. And this became known as the Pushtunistan issue. And Daud was one of the prime pushers of that issue when he was Prime Minister, and because of the tension with Pakistan, Daud in the 1950s decided that he had to beef up the Afghan armed forces, and he came first to the United States for military assistance. We turned him down after a great deal of soul searching, because of our own close relationship in both CENTO and SEATO with Pakistan and because we did not want to cause the Russians to get overly anxious about what was going on inside Afghanistan and attempt to intervene in Afghanistan. Well, unfortunately Daud decided to turn to the Russians for this military equipment, and in the mid-"50s the Russians began their infiltration of Afghanistan through military people who had been trained to use Russian equipment in the Soviet Union. And at the same time in the "60s—not at the same time, but a little later in the "60s—the Russians were able to get a Communist political movement going in Afghanistan. As it's Afghanistan, of course, there had to be more than one communist party—there were two, which has plagued the communist movement ever since, the Parcham and Khalq parties. But at any rate, Daud opened the door.

When I first met with him, in '73, he tried to take care of his knowledge of his reputation in the United States by saying to me, “I know I was known as the Red Prince, and I know you Americans think that because the Russians gave us all this equipment, and because they built this road through the Hindu Kush and the Salang Pass, that I've opened up Afghanistan to invasion. I want you to know that's not going to happen.” He was

strangely, for a very powerful man, for a very patriotically powerful man, and a ruthless man when it came usually to his internal political enemies, he was strangely naive about the Russians. And it was only quite late in his tenure in '77 that there was evidence that he was beginning to understand that the Pushtunistan issue had opened up opportunities for the Russians. And it was only in that very last year of his term, including one visit that he made to Moscow, that he began to stand up to the Russians. He came in in '73, and he brought a lot of pro- Soviet Parcham or Khalq people into the government with him, and gradually in '75-'76-'77, he moved those people out of the central government. But not all of them. In fact, I think he did not know that some of the people close to him were in fact Communists and undoubtedly in the pay of the Soviets. His naivete, and his strange—which I still can't understand—failure to act ruthlessly at the critical moment in April of '78 cost him his power, and his life.

There was a strange set of circumstances which has been well written about elsewhere, notably in some works by the Afghanologist Louis DePree, which I need not go into in detail. But in April '78 the climax was reached when there was a major funeral procession for an assassinated Communist leader. This was the first non-government-sponsored political demonstration in the entire Daud regime, and Daud responded by arresting the known leaders of the two Communist parties. But he did not arrest enough people. He did not kill them, which I think he would have done earlier in his career. He did not arrest some of the Communist leaders in the military, nor did he cut off communications between these arrested political leaders and the military. And the result was the arrested political leaders asked their friends in the military to stage the coup, which they did successfully April 27-April 28, 1978—exactly 14 years ago, as far as this interview is concerned.

So Daud was an interesting man. The only American political figure I could compare him to would be somebody like Sitting Bull. He was a powerful tribal chief, devoted to his larger tribe, namely the country of Afghanistan, but naive about the power he faced north of the border. He tried very hard in the beginning of '76 to solve the Pushtunistan issue. He met a couple of times with Bhutto, and then later after Bhutto was overthrown by General Zia,

he met a few times with Zia. And, I think he was making a lot of progress. That fact, plus his beginning to stand up to the Russians, plus his having moved a lot of the Communists out of Kabul, all contributed, I believe, I'm convinced, to Brezhnev's conclusion that they didn't need Daud anymore and that they'd be better off with somebody much closer to them running Afghanistan. I don't think the Russians planned the coup in '78, but once it started they certainly helped the Communists in the armed forces to direct the attacks on the Presidential palace in Kabul, for example, and run a successful military operation. And then the minute their friends came into power, they poured in all kinds of psychological, military and economic assistance.

Q: Well, they were sort of stuck with him too because the communist world view, up to that time, and for some time after that was, that you can never retreat from anyplace that you've already taken because the world revolution is inevitable. You're sort of hoisted on the petard of your own ideology to doing some things that are more extreme than you might want to do from a strictly rational standpoint.

ELIOT: Absolutely. A lot of people have asked me the obvious question: why did the Russians do this? You've just given one of the reasons. The other reason is what I call Russian imperialism. The march of Russian expansion into Asia was stopped by the British empire in the 19th century, and here they had an opportunity to expand the empire. It was both ideological and imperial. And it's as simple as that. There is no better explanation than that, though the Russians themselves would put out disinformation such as they were fearing Islamic fundamentalism in Soviet Central Asia. That's baloney. The Afghans posed no threat.

Let me go back just a moment then to say a few words about American policy. From the Second World War on, American policy in Afghanistan had two prongs. One was to help the Afghans maintain their independence from the Soviet Union. And secondly, it was to give humanitarian aid to what is one of the poorest countries in the world. We also worked as best we could to solve the Pushtunistan issue, but we weren't very effective in

doing that. We worked hard at it, bearing in mind that this was a wedge for the Russians. Obviously we didn't succeed in keeping Afghanistan out of Soviet hands. I think we did, however, do about as well in that regard as we could have. The fact that Kissinger came twice to Kabul while I was there was an indication to the Russians that we cared what was going on there.

Unfortunately, when the Carter administration came in that kind of global strategic thinking disappeared from the higher levels of the American administration. And you will recall that in that period in '77-'78, the Shah was collapsing, and the Russians could see we weren't doing much to keep him on the throne. You remember the incident of the Soviet brigade in Cuba where we ran up that hill, but unlike Teddy Roosevelt, didn't take it? We retreated back down again. And we had cut off aid to Pakistan because of Pakistan's development of nuclear capability. So the view from Moscow was, I think, that they could get away with something in Afghanistan without too much concern for what the American response would be.

Q: You know in retrospect, one thing I was involved in in that period—although sort of sniping in a guerrilla way from the sidelines, was something called a Soviet-US negotiation to restrict arms in the Indian Ocean area. That went very far. It was very naive, extremely naive.

ELIOT: I agree with that too.

Q: As a matter of fact, I helped to kill that, but that's another story. In retrospect, and I put this together with Afghanistan, what they were getting there must have been signals that we were so naive that we were willing to scotch alliances, including the ANZUS relationship. When the Australians got wind of all this, they helped to kill this. But it was the American side—before I heard about it—that proposed that, not only was this whole Indian Ocean area to be more or less neutralized, but the area was defined in a way, at American initiative, to include the seas around Australia all the way up to the eastern end

of Australia. So the Australians would be in a position of finding the ANZUS relationship valuable only against invasion from Fiji, which they were not really thinking of too actively at the time. That's a little aside. Go ahead.

ELIOT: Well, I think your point is well taken. Moscow looked at all this and saw a weakness. And, I think, probably rightly so. In retrospect, clearly the Russians, the Soviets, Brezhnev and company, and Andropov, and the others involved in this decision, made a terrible mistake. And I must say, I would have told them so had they asked my advice. They had everything they wanted in Afghanistan. They had a friendly government. There was no threat from Afghanistan—I'm talking about Daud. They were able to milk Afghanistan's economic resources—natural gas and some minerals, without interference from anybody else. It all reminded me of Mark Twain's saying, “overreachin' don't pay”. I have a very good friend, Tony Arnold, who was Deputy Station Chief at that time in Kabul, a Soviet specialist, who has just finished a book which hopefully will be published sometime in 1992, on the effect of the Afghanistan war on the break-up of the Soviet Union. There's absolutely no question but that it had a major effect on subsequent domestic political events in the Soviet Union. It also, right today, we're seeing that the Mujahideen are emerging triumphant after fourteen terrible years for the people of Afghanistan. And one can say, looking back over history now, that the British and Russian empires both reached their apex in Afghanistan. And all I can say is, three cheers for the people of Afghanistan.

It's a wonderful country, a wonderful people who have suffered tremendous losses of infrastructure, and over a million people killed, etc., in the last fourteen years. They are going to have a hard time getting their political act together again, but at least they've got the Soviet Union totally off their backs and have a chance at resolving their own problems in the future in their own way. And I hope the United States will be able to assist, with the rest of the international community, in helping reconstruct that country. We're so broke

I'm not sure whether we'll be able to do that, but I hope we will contribute to that effort substantially.

While I was there, I was, of course, always aware of the fragility of the Daud regime. It's political base was very narrow, and as he got older he made it still narrower, and I was always concerned about what the Soviets were up to. I hoped that our continuing forceful interest in Afghanistan would restrain the Soviets, and I worked very hard, and with some success, on Daud in getting him to realize, as many of his advisers realized—and I wasn't the only one talking to him—that the only threat Afghanistan faced in the world was from the Soviet Union. But he moved too late, and Soviet ideological and imperialistic imperatives were too strong. And we, in the Carter years, looked too weak for that policy to succeed.

Certainly one of the lowest moments of my life was listening to Kabul radio in the morning following a night of fighting all over the city, hearing that the President and most of his immediate advisers had been killed, and that these new characters, on whom we had some files, were taking over. And it was equally difficult as Ambassador to go to these new characters who killed some of my closest friends, not only saying that the United States was continuing relationships with the new government of Afghanistan, but asking, as my predecessor had to do, the new government to approve the sending of a new American Ambassador, which Daud had already approved before he was killed. So two consecutive ambassadors had to get two agr#ments from the Afghans.

Sometime later, and this pleased me a lot, I saw Henry Kissinger somewhere, and he said, “Ted, we did everything we could. There was nothing we could have done to keep this from happening.” I think that's right. I think we did our best given, Daud's naivete, and given the other factors that I've mentioned.

Q: Yes, well it's awfully remote from the United States. We don't have the power to...

ELIOT: That's right. The Foreign Minister, I was told later, asked Daud to call me up while the battle was raging in the city, and ask for American air support. Now, where would that have come from? Whether the Shah would have stepped in at that point, I very much doubt. Culturally, and otherwise, there's not a hell of a lot of love lost between the Iranians and the Afghans. I don't think that was a feasible option. I don't think at that point he could have been saved. The question was whether six or eight, or a year or two earlier, things could have been done to make it come out differently. But I don't think so in retrospect, and that's not, I hope, seen as a self-serving, or self-justification. I think that's the way it was.

Q: A little footnote that...I can't remember his name now, it started with a T. The first communist...

ELIOT: Taraki.

Q: Taraki, as I remember worked as a Foreign Service national in our Embassy when I was there.

ELIOT: In USIS as a translator, and his second in command, who succeeded him in a bloody coup in the fall of '79, Hafizullah Amin, who was a real butcher, was educated at the same school you were, Columbia University.

Q: Is that right? Now I understand.

ELIOT: Then, of course, the Soviets had Amin killed, or killed him themselves, and brought in Babrak Karmal who was putty in their hands. Then they trained a new KGB chief inside Afghanistan, and his name is Najibullah. One of the reasons, of course, that it's taken so long to get the Mujahideen to work on a settlement which they're now in the middle of, is that they would never have anything to do with Mr. Najibullah, and I don't blame them. Any diplomatic effort to include Najibullah in the internal political solution in Afghanistan could

never succeed. He's seeking refuge in the UN headquarters in Kabul, and he better not stick his head outside is all I can say.

Q: Yes, there's too much history there.

ELIOT: The Afghans have long memories and long knives. Oh, I could tell an awful lot of stories about Afghanistan. It's a spectacular country, and a wonderful people for whom laughter lies right beneath the surface even in the direst poverty. I've never known an American who served in Afghanistan...and at our peak when I was there we had some 600 people in the official American community—A.I.D., Peace Corps, USIA, you name it, including descendants and I've never known an American who did not enjoy the experience. It's a very special place.

Q: Well, Ted, I guess we've covered Afghanistan.

ELIOT: ...more or less.

Q: ...as far as we could, we're not going on forever.

ELIOT: This is not my usual lecture which takes an hour or so.

Q: You came back from there to be Inspector General for a fairly brief period before retiring, and went on to the Fletcher School where you were Dean. I think we've covered the bulk of it. Do you have any comments on this later period in your career?

ELIOT: Well, the Fletcher School, I'll just say a couple things about. One is, over the years, and Fletcher has been around now since the early ''30s—while I was there we celebrated its 50th anniversary—it has played an extraordinary role in training Foreign Service officers. That's not the only people it has trained. Its students have gone on to international business, international banking, the World Bank, various other international organizations. But it has trained an enormous number of American and non-American diplomats who have gone on to have very distinguished careers—just to mention: Tom Pickering,

Mac Toon, Bill Sullivan, I could go on, a long list of prominent American diplomats who emerged out of Fletcher. And one of the questions I constantly had from the students when I was Dean was, what kind of a career is the Foreign Service? And I would always tell them, obviously there are some difficulties particularly in the modern age where your spouse may also want a profession, and how does that fit into a Foreign Service career? There are health hazards, security hazards, all those things, but if you want to be close to the foreign affairs process, not necessarily ever making foreign policy because foreign policy is made by the Secretary of State and the President in the final analysis, but having an influence on it, and involved in the carrying out and execution of foreign policy, the Foreign Service is the place to be. I didn't convince as many students as were convinced of this earlier in the days when people like Bill Sullivan and Mac Toon went to Fletcher. Then it was clear that the State Department and the Foreign Service was the place to go if you were interested in international affairs. There are many other places to go now which young people think are equally exciting. Whether that's good for the country or not, I have mixed feeling about. I think the professional diplomatic service of the United States is an enormously important professional body that Presidents and Secretaries of State, looking ahead into the future, are not wise to ignore, or not to support. So that sometimes disturbed me when I was at Fletcher.

I might close just with an anecdote. Each year I had to give a talk, convocation, welcoming the new students, and old students, and faculty, etc. would be there. One year my theme was, what kind of qualities does a person need to be in international affairs, whether it's the Foreign Service, or any other aspect of international intercourse. And I listed the usual things: intellectual curiosity, and hopefully an ability to communicate well with other people. I had four or five themes of that kind. I thought I gave a pretty good talk. Afterwards there was a big reception, and one of our professors emeritus, came up to me and he said, “Dean, you left our one very important quality that's required.” And I said, “What's that?” He said, “Luck.”

And I must say looking back, as you've forced me to do this afternoon at my own career, I was blessed with a lot of luck, and I was also blessed with a wife who was a tremendous help all through these years. Without those two factors, I not only wouldn't have had the fun I had, but I wouldn't have had any of the seeming success I might have had.

Q: Thanks, Ted.

End of interview